



DoD attacks rising pharmacy costs, improves quality

TRICARE Management Activity

In the first full year since the Department of Defense began implementing the Uniform Formulary process to review and classify prescription drugs, \$500 million has been saved through improved formulary and contract management.

In addition, since its deployment in 2001, the Pharmacy Data Transaction Service has avoided more than 171,000 potentially life-threatening drug interactions, according to Dr. William Winkenwerder, Jr., assistant secretary of Defense for Health Affairs.

“More than 2.1 million prescriptions are filled in the Military Health System during a typical week,” Winkenwerder said. “Since we began using the Pharmacy Uniform Formulary last year, we have been able to move forward rapidly to make prudent decisions that protect our beneficiaries’ health and at the same time save costs.”

The Uniform Formulary, implemented in 2005, established a process that places prescription drugs into one of three cost-share tiers, based upon their relative clinical and cost effectiveness.

“These pharmacy decisions reflect our strong interest in seeing that our beneficiaries get the medications they need,” Winkenwerder said. “It is our goal to ensure that the best balance of efficacy and cost effectiveness is accomplished.”

The DoD Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee meets quarterly to recommend medications for placement on the Uniform Formulary or to be non-formulary. The group is made up of physicians and phar-

macists, representatives from the military Services, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Coast Guard. Their recommendations are vetted with a Beneficiary Advisory Panel, whose membership includes representatives of active duty families and retirees, civilian health care professionals and TRICARE contractors.

The Uniform Formulary is just one of several measures that DoD has implemented over the past five years to enhance quality and reduce costs, according to Capt. Tom McGinnis, TRICARE chief pharmaceutical officer.

“Savings have also come from DoD/VA pursuing joint contracts for our pharmacy programs. In fiscal 2007, it is estimated that we will save nearly \$200 million alone by using joint national contracts,” he said.

A critical component to the success of the pharmacy program is the implementation of federal pricing.

“We currently receive federal price discounts for prescriptions dispensed through our military hospitals and clinics and our mail order program,” Winkenwerder said. “We also believe that federal pricing authority extends to the pharmacy retail network. The pharmaceutical companies disagree, and an organization representing their interests has filed suit against us. This is unfortunate. We are trying to get this resolved because the financial benefits to the department and the taxpayers are considerable.”

Beneficiaries are also being encouraged to use the TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy program for their maintenance medications because they will save

money and it is convenient.

“Mail order is a win/win because it reduces the department’s costs dramatically, while offering maintenance medications to our beneficiaries for reductions from what they are paying to the retailers,” he said.

“The program is perfectly safe and convenient and the prescriptions are delivered directly to your home,” McGinnis said.

The Department is launching a marketing campaign to encourage more TRICARE beneficiaries to use mail order. “Beneficiaries can access a registered pharmacist at any time via a toll-free number to answer any questions they have about their prescriptions,” he added.

In 2001, DoD implemented, a new cutting-edge, off-the-shelf software program for physicians and pharmacists called PDTS, it has improved the quality of DoD prescription services and enhanced patient safety by reducing the likelihood of adverse drug interactions and duplicate treatments. With each new or refill prescription, a screen automatically checks the prescription against the beneficiary’s complete medication history before it is dispensed. This is a transparent online activity that occurs in the background for health care providers.

“PDTS has resulted in much higher quality medical care not only for DoD beneficiaries, but for many other Americans as well,” McGinnis said. “PDTS is the first data system to centralize such information and make it available through the entire community of TRICARE providers.”

This initiative prompted civilian medical facilities and pharmacies nationwide to use adverse event screening software.

“For the Military Health System, it has reduced fraud and abuse, created better management reporting, saved money through the avoidance of adverse events because they cost money to treat – and most important, PDTS has increased patient safety,” McGinnis said.

DoD is planning to implement other initiatives to manage costs of the pharmacy benefit so that it can be sustained into the future. In February, as part of the President’s budget for 2007, the department rolled out some modest pharmacy cost share increases.

“There will be no fee changes whatsoever for the active duty service member,” Winkenwerder said. “For all other beneficiaries including those aged 65 and over, there will be no pharmaceutical co-pays in military clinics and zero co-pays for mail order generic medications. However, there will be increases in retail pharmacy co-pays and higher co-pays for a few non-covered medications.”

Brig. Gen. Elder Granger, deputy director of TRICARE, is proud of the DoD Pharmacy Program and its great strides.

“These health benefits our military community enjoys have been earned and are richly deserved,” he said. “We are committed to sustaining this world-class health system by placing it on a sound fiscal foundation for the long-term.”

For more information on the Uniform Formulary, visit TRICARE’s Web site, www.tricare.osd.mil/pharmacy/unif_form.cfm.

More troops, families tapping into DoD counseling services

Story by
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With high operational tempos and multiple deployments increasingly becoming the norm, more service members and their families are seeking counseling services, the Pentagon’s family policy chief said.

The Department of Defense started expanding its array of counseling services shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, to help counter the stress military service places on service members and their families, particularly during wartime, Barbara Thompson, director of DoD’s Office of Family Policy told American Forces Press Service.

The result is a vast family-assistance counseling network that emphasizes problem solving and communications skills that help individuals and families get through difficult times.

“This is a particularly challenging time for families and service members,” Thompson said, noting the frequency of deployments that often separate families for 13 to 14 months at a time.

But deployments aren’t the only stressful times, she said. The busy period leading up to a deployment can be almost as difficult, and the adjustment time immediately after a deployment can be the toughest of all.

The National Mental Health Association identified symptoms affected

people may experience:

- Difficulty completing tasks
- Trouble concentrating
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Apathy and emotional numbing
- Irritability and anger
- Sadness and depression
- Feeling powerless
- Extreme hunger or lack of appetite
- Difficulty making decisions
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Headaches or stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Excessive drinking or drug use
- Feeling withdrawn

Everyone experiences stress differently, and these and other symptoms aren’t unusual for people who have undergone deployments or had a loved one deploy, Thompson said.

“These are normal reactions to difficult circumstances,” she said.

The goal, she said, is to address these issues before they escalate.

The National Mental Health Association recommends tips for coping during difficult times. They range from avoiding excessive exposure to news and talking with others to exercising, eating right and taking part in relaxing, soothing activities.

The group urges people who can’t seem to shake these feelings to seek treatment.

Nearly every military post has a family service or support center, chaplain,

child development center or other service where families can get help, from crisis intervention to counseling, depending on their need. In many cases, non-medical counseling -- educational and outreach sessions as well as individual, group and marriage counseling - is the best medicine, Thompson said.

Services extend beyond active duty troops and their families to include two groups not always included in military programs: National Guard and reserve members not on active duty, and DoD civilian employees who have deployed overseas.

“This is a system of support as a service member and a family traverses the military lifestyle,” Thompson said. “It’s life coaching, problem solving and providing that extra level of support when a crisis occurs.”

Educational sessions, the broadest form of counseling provided, focus on basic life skills, such as stress and anger management, communications, decision making and financial stability.

Outreach sessions are a bit more targeted, with counselors or social workers attending town hall meetings and greeting troops arriving from deployments to ensure they know counseling services are available if they need them. Counselors also present briefings before, during or after deployments and offer group coaching.

In addition, trained social workers and

counselors offer private counseling to help people who request it work through troubling issues. These issues can run the gamut, from deployment-related anxiety and family conflicts to emotional or financial difficulties.

“We realize that for many people, these issues are not in isolation,” Thompson said. “They’re often layered challenges that overlap. The trick is to address them as early as possible before they become bigger challenges.”

Thompson emphasized that such programs augment rather than replace the military’s network of unit leaders, chaplains, child development center staffs, and family support centers that have traditionally offered the first step in crisis intervention.

Troops or family members interested in these programs can get a referral from these base service providers. They can also request help directly by calling Military OneSource, toll-free from the states at 800-342-9647 or overseas at 800-3429-6477.

Thompson calls it a positive sign that several thousand service members have taken advantage of the non-medical counseling services offered and expressed hope others will follow their lead.

“We want to make sure everybody has access to this expertise,” she said. “It’s a way of helping families cope with the day-to-day issues that affect their lives.”



Channel 21 features Pentagon Channel programming

As of April 3, the Pentagon Channel will feature the following programs on Channel 21. These programs are subject to change each week and will be updated accordingly.

Monday
ATS Reloaded, 5:30 a.m.
American Veteran, 9:30 a.m.
Army Newswatch, 11 a.m.
Inside Afghanistan/FJ Iraq, 1 p.m.
Around the Services, 5:30 p.m.
Focus on the Force, 10 p.m.

Tuesday
Around the Services, 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.
RECON, 11 a.m.
Focus on the Force, 1 p.m.
Army Newswatch, 3 p.m.
Freedom Journal Iraq/Inside Afghanistan, 4 p.m.
Army Newswatch, 7 p.m.

Wednesday
Around the Services, 8 a.m., 8 p.m.
Army Newswatch, 9:30 a.m. and 9:30 p.m.
American Veteran, 1 p.m.
Inside Afghanistan/Freedom Journal Iraq, 2 p.m.

RECON, 3:30 p.m.
Focus on the Force, 6:30 p.m.

Thursday
Around the Services, 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.
Army Newswatch, 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.
Freedom Journal Iraq/Inside Afghanistan, Noon
Focus on the Force, 1 p.m.
RECON, 3:30 p.m.
American Veteran, 5 p.m.

Friday
Around the Services, 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.
Army Newswatch, 10:30 a.m.
RECON, Noon
American Veteran, 2:30 p.m.
Freedom Journal Iraq/Inside Afghanistan, 4 p.m.
Focus on the Force, 6:30 p.m.
ATS Reloaded, 7 p.m.

Saturday
Around the Services, 5:30 a.m.
Inside Afghanistan/VA News, 7:30 a.m.
American Veteran, 1:30 p.m.
Army Healthwatch, 2 p.m.
ATS Reloaded, 5:30 p.m.
Battleground, 7 p.m.

RECON, 8 p.m.

Sunday
ATS Reloaded, 5:30 a.m., 9:30 p.m.
Freedom Journal Iraq, 10:30 a.m. & 4:30 p.m.
Today’s Military, 1 p.m.
Around the Service, 7:30 p.m.
Army Newswatch – Bi-weekly report on the men and women of the Army

Around the Services – From the Pentagon Channel NewsCenter, daily half-hour program featuring military news from top defense officials and the military services from around the world
RECON – A monthly information television program providing an in-depth look at a variety of topics, highlighting the accomplishments of U.S. Military men and women.
Your Corps – Monthly view of the men and women of the Marine Corps
Freedom Journal Iraq – A daily news program produced by American Forces Network Iraq. The program focuses on military missions, operations and U.S. military forces in Iraq
Navy Marine Corp News – A weekly look at the men and women of today’s

sea service.

Opportunity Showcase - A monthly program dealing with a variety of subjects that benefit small business owners, transitioning military members and other subjects of opportunity-produced by the United States Air Force
The American Veteran - A half-hour video news magazine designed to inform veterans, their families and their communities about the services and benefits they have earned through their service to America and to recognize and honor that service
Battleground - Every weekend, this series features historic films from WWII, Korean War, and the Vietnam War. A Pentagon Channel Original Series
Focus on the Force – A weekly program highlighting missions, operations and people of the U.S. military.
Inside Afghanistan – Presents the latest from Operation Enduring Freedom, showing the activities of American Troops in country.
ATS Reloaded – ATS-Reloaded revisits the best of the week and keeps you updated on information that’s important to you.